

Elementary School Parents[®]

September 2025
Vol. 37, No. 1

make the difference!



Back-to-school routines can help your child get off to a great start

Establishing consistent routines right from the beginning of the school year sets your child up for success. Here are some simple, yet effective, strategies to implement:

- **Prepare for school** the night before. Many families find that evening organization prevents the morning “rush hour.” Set aside time each evening to review school papers, make lunches, pack backpacks, and choose outfits for the next day.
- **Establish a regular bedtime** that allows your child to get the nine to 12 hours of sleep recommended for elementary schoolers. Try to maintain this bedtime even on weekends. When a sleep schedule is consistent, it’s much easier for your child to fall asleep and wake

up at the appropriate times during the school week.

- **Develop a morning routine.** When children follow the same steps in the same order each morning, they are less likely to forget important tasks.
- **Designate a regular “work time”** where your child can concentrate on schoolwork and studying. Pick a time when your child will have the most energy and motivation. Create a quiet study spot, complete with adequate lighting and necessary supplies.
- **Stay organized with a calendar.** Schedule important commitments such as schoolwork, family meals and free time. This visual tool will also show any unscheduled time available for additional activities.

Unlock your child’s inner motivation



Most families have used rewards to motivate children at one time or another. And there’s no ques-

tion that reward systems work.

But when the rewards stop, the motivation sometimes stops, too. Researchers have found that students who are motivated *only* by the desire to earn a reward for a high grade rarely do more than the minimum they need to get by.

However, when students are motivated by an inner desire to learn, they are more likely to stick with a task. Students with *intrinsic motivation* learn because they’re curious. They retain what they have learned longer, and they earn higher grades.

To foster intrinsic motivation:

- **Encourage your child think** about assignments: “What do I want to learn from this?”
- **Help your child see progress** when working on big tasks.
- **Offer positive feedback.**
- **Encourage your child to use** positive self-talk. “I am capable and I will learn this!”

Source: L. Ferlazzo, *The Student Motivation Handbook: 50 Ways to Boost an Intrinsic Desire to Learn*, Taylor & Francis.

Family-school partnerships support learning & achievement



Studies consistently link family engagement in education to students' academic success. When teachers, families and students work together, anything is possible!

Like any successful partnership, a strong family-school relationship thrives on trust, clear communication and mutual respect. Here's how to build that foundation:

- **Set the tone.** Show your interest by participating in back-to-school events. Introduce yourself to the teacher and exchange contact information. Ask how you can support learning at home. Fill out and return school forms promptly.
- **Share information** throughout the school year. Tell the teacher if there are any changes at home, such as a new sibling or a divorce, that may affect your child in the classroom.

- **Communicate as partners.** Respectful communication fosters better outcomes than demands. Try framing requests using *we* to emphasize teamwork. "How can *we* work together to support Erin?" Remember, the teacher is your partner in your child's education.
- **Maintain a positive outlook.** Future conversations with the teacher will likely highlight your child's strengths. Be open to also hearing about areas for growth. You and the teacher share the same goal: your child's success.

"At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents."

—Jane D. Hull

Manage your child's screen time by creating a family media plan



Digital devices are an important part of our world—and are very appealing to elementary schoolers. Technology helps your child discover new ideas, connect with others and access educational information for school.

However, too much passive recreational screen time can negatively affect students' schoolwork, health, activity levels and face-to-face communication skills.

To help your child strike a healthy balance, experts recommend creating a personalized family media plan that answers the following questions:

- **What devices** do I want my child to have access to?
- **Where will devices** be allowed and where will they be off-limits?
- **How much time** will my child be allowed to use them?
- **Will the same rules** apply during weekends and school breaks?
- **What content** is appropriate for my child to access?
- **How will I maintain** consistency?
- **What consequences** will there be for misusing devices?
- **What example** am I setting through my own use of technology?

Source: *Ways Parents Can Manage Kids' Technology Use*, QuickTip Brochure, The Parent Institute.

Are you making read-aloud time the best it can be?



Reading aloud to children is crucial for helping them become better readers. It's also fun! Are you making the most of the time you

spend reading with your child? Answer *yes* or *no* to each of the questions below to find out:

___ **1. Do you have** a regular read-aloud time together that lasts at least 20 minutes each day?

___ **2. Do you make** read-aloud time fun by letting family members take turns picking the books you read together?

___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to read a few pages aloud to you?

___ **4. Do you stop reading** at an exciting place so your child will want to read again the next day?

___ **5. Do you sometimes pause** to talk about what you've just read or to make predictions about what's about to happen?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're supporting your elementary schooler's literacy development by reading aloud together. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

Elementary School
Parents
make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May.
Copyright © 2025, The Parent Institute,
a division of PaperClip Media, Inc., an
independent, private agency. Equal
opportunity employer.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Downtime is vital for your child's health and academic success



When days are packed with lessons, sports and other structured activities, children can become overwhelmed and stressed out. As a result, they don't do as well in school and are more likely to get sick.

To determine if your child's schedule is balanced, ask yourself:

- **Does my child** have time to play with friends? Practices that are planned and run by adults don't count. Kids need time to relax and just "hang out" with other children.
- **When does my child** complete assignments? Working on them while traveling between activities isn't effective. Schoolwork takes concentration, and that takes time.

- **Why is my child** in these activities? Sometimes, the push for a child to join a class or sport comes from the family's own desires.
- **Does my child** get enough sleep? Children between the ages of six and 12 need nine to 12 hours of sleep each day to function well. School is your child's most important job. If too many activities are getting in the way, ask your student to make a choice: "Which two activities do you enjoy the most?"

Remember, finding a balance between structured activities and unstructured free time is key to your child's happiness and overall health.

Source: C. Hennig, "The Lost Art of Play: How Overscheduling Makes Children Anxious," CBC News.

Begin the school year with a commitment to attendance



Your child's teachers will do their best to help your child learn and succeed in school. But there's one thing that *only you* can do—make sure your child attends every day.

Children who are absent regularly fall behind and score lower on tests. They can also have a hard time making and keeping friends—especially in elementary school.

Absences in elementary school set a pattern for absences in later school years. Lots of absences often lead to students dropping out of school.

To reinforce attendance:

- **Discuss the value** of education and let your child know that school attendance is not optional.
- **Discuss some of the consequences** of missing school, such as needing to do make-up work, missing

friends, not understanding new concepts.

- **Follow school policies** for keeping students home due to illness. Don't allow your child to stay home simply to catch up on schoolwork or sleep.
- **Promote frequent hand-washing** to help keep your child healthy and in school.
- **Schedule medical appointments** during non-school hours when possible.
- **Plan vacations** for when school is not in session.
- **Track your child's absences.** Look for any patterns that need to be addressed.
- **Talk to the teacher** or the school counselor if your child regularly doesn't want to go to school.

Source: A. Ansari and M.A. Gottfried, "The Grade-Level and Cumulative Outcomes of Absenteeism," *Child Development*, The Society for Research in Child Development.

Q: My first grader is very shy and has a difficult time making friends. I'm worried that this will negatively affect my child in school. What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Some children are outgoing and others are not. While you can't change your child's personality, you can instill more confidence when speaking and working with others.

To build social confidence:

- **Role-play together.** Shy children don't always know what to say to another child. Say, "Let's pretend you're at recess. Juan and Megan are playing a fun game that you'd like to join. What could you say?" At first, you might have your child pretend to be one of the other children. You can pretend to be your child. Then, change roles.
- **Read books about friends.** Talk about what good friends do—and don't do. Thinking about what makes a good friend may help your child identify someone in class who could be a friend.
- **Schedule a playdate** for your child with a classmate. Some children feel more comfortable with just one other person than they do in a crowd.
- **Use your child's strengths** as a way for your student to meet other children with similar interests. Does your child like art? Try an art class at a community center. Is your child athletic? Consider signing your student up for a youth sports team.

When children practice the skills that they enjoy, they develop self-confidence—which can also help them make friends!

It Matters: Schoolwork

Understand the hidden value of assignments



Schoolwork gives students the opportunity to practice the skills they are learning in school. Completing

assignments at home also teaches valuable life lessons.

When students complete work independently, they learn skills such as:

- **Organization.** Keeping track of due dates and assignments helps elementary schoolers learn the value of being organized. Show your child how to use organizational tools, such as a daily planner, folders and binders.
- **Responsibility.** Students learn the importance of fulfilling obligations. They also learn that they are accountable for their mistakes and successes.
- **Initiative.** Due dates can help students learn how to be self-motivated. Choosing to start working on the social studies project as soon as it is assigned shows initiative.
- **Perseverance.** Many families want to protect children from frustration. However, making your child's life easier now may make it harder in the future. Sticking with a tough assignment and refusing to give up helps your child gain confidence and develop perseverance.
- **Time management.** Breaking down large tasks and prioritizing responsibilities in order to complete assignments on time helps students learn how to manage time effectively.

Offer your elementary schooler the right kind of support

Homework is one communication link between home and school. Teachers assign homework to help students understand and practice classwork. When families are involved with homework, they find out what students are learning.

What does being involved mean? Teachers encourage families to:

- **Make sure your child understands assignments.** Look over the instructions together. Then, have your child explain them to you.
- **Review completed assignments.** Even if you're not present when your child does homework, always ask to see it. Your interest sends the message that completing work is important.
- **Encourage your child to take a break when struggling.** Then, try to help with what is frustrating your child.



- **Let the teacher know** if your child consistently struggles with homework. Ask what you can do at home to help.
- **Remain positive.** Your attitude will rub off on your child.

Encourage your child to do more than the bare minimum



What if a little extra effort could lead to a lot more learning for your child? It can! Doing more than the bare minimum helps

students develop:

- **A deeper understanding.** Going the extra mile can improve comprehension of the subject matter.
- **Increased mastery.** Extra practice helps new skills and knowledge stick.
- **Pride in work.** Putting in extra effort often results in a greater sense of accomplishment.

Try these simple ways to help your child go the extra mile with:

- **Reading.** When your child is given a reading assignment, suggest reading a few pages ahead.
- **Projects.** When your child has a project, suggest starting early and taking extra steps—such as adding a nice picture or a colorful cover.
- **Math.** When your child is assigned math problems, suggest trying a few extra problems.
- **Science.** Suggest looking up a related video or article to explore a new concept further.